

**Statement
By
The Honorable George Radanovich
Before the
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
House Committee on Resources
On
April 10, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for considering H.R. 3401 today, the California Five Mile Regional Learning Center Transfer Act.

This bill transfers 27.1 acres of National Forest Service property from the Stanislaus Forest to the Clovis Unified School District. By so doing, this legislation will permit the school district to continue to operate the Five Mile Regional Learning Center on this National Forest land and, more specifically, the bill would allow the school district to fund necessary capital improvements to the Learning Center facilities. **Without this legislation, these improvements and non-federal expenditures would not be permitted and the Learning Center could not continue due to dilapidation.**

The Five Mile Regional Learning Center is an Outdoor Environmental Education School that benefits youth from all over the state of California. The Regional Learning Center serves 138 schools from approximately 60 school districts in California. Approximately 14,000 students participated in this educational program last year. A variety of classes are offered with an emphasis on natural resource conservation. In addition to the

environmental education program, the school district offers course work on character development, team building, and individualized challenge activities such as high ropes. During the summer the site is used by a variety of groups. In addition, a number of counties in conjunction with local and state agencies bring "At risk kids" to the program's Life's Alternatives Involving Risks (LAIR) Adventure Academy.

The 120 acre Five Mile Regional Learning Center has been operated by the Clovis Unified School District since 1989. Prior to that the Fresno County Office of Education starting in 1969 operated the project.

While the Five Mile Regional Learning Center is located on National Forest Land, the federal government plays no role in the operation or maintenance of the facilities used by the program or in delivery of the educational program. The National Forest Service merely permits the use of these facilities and public land to the Clovis Unified School District, and monitors the program to ensure the District adheres to permit requirements. *The Forest Service has not funded or appropriated monies to maintain or operate these buildings.* According to Forest Service documents the, *“Regional Learning Center facility has outlived its life by years, and, if it were not for the efforts of the Clovis Unified School District, the buildings would be in a state of disrepair useable to no one.”*

The Clovis Unified School District has--on average--spent more that \$1 million per year over the last 12 years on *operation and maintenance*. Without transfer of ownership, the

Clovis Unified School District is prohibited by law from spending its money on ***capital improvements*** to ensure that these facilities do not fall into disrepair.

In addition to the ongoing commitment of spending more than ***\$1 million per year in operation costs***, the Clovis Unified School District is willing to invest ***\$5 million over 5 years in capital improvements and renovations*** to the existing facilities.

I understand there are concerns regarding the fair market value of this property. Clovis Unified is not a private sector, for-profit institution. It is a school district. The school district does not intend to use this acreage for marketplace purposes. Instead, Clovis Unified is committed maintaining the public value in this land and these facilities out of its own pocket.

Additionally, in the 106th Congress, H.R. 150 was signed into law. It provides the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to convey Forest Service Land for educational purposes. The Forest Service has yet to make any conveyances under H.R. 150 and has yet to write regulations to implement the Act, which is why H.R. 3401 is before us today.

In addition to the transfer, the H.R. 3401 authorizes a new Special Use permit that would continue to authorize Clovis Unified's use of the adjacent 100 acres. There are no structures in need of capital improvement on the 100 acres.

The federal costs of this transfer are administrative-only and negligible to the amount that the school district will be spending to increase the value of the property and run this valuable educational program for the children of California.

In conclusion, this legislation is a positive effort in effective local, state and federal government cooperation. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and addressing any issues that arise today.

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing.